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The making and muting of an indigenous media activist: Imagination and ideology in Charles Round Low Cloud's "Indian News"

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ABSTRACT
In this article, I examine an example of American Indian activism through the once-dominant mass medium of the newspaper. I focus on Ho-Chunk author Charles Round Low Cloud and his development of an "Indian News" column into a vehicle for activism against everyday forms of racial oppression in the 1930s and on the ways others involved in publishing his column used the medium to subvert his message. The analysis shows how nonindigenous actors can mute activist messages through practices designed to celebrate indigenous voices. I argue that both indigenous media activism and reactions against such activism rely on the "mediated imagination": the mediation of the use and reception of media messages by cultural ideologies and by individual creativity. Recognition of the mediated imagination, therefore, complements efforts to understand how language and other semiotic ideologies shape interpretations of social reality. It also facilitates analysis of the potentials and limitations of indigenous activism that uses existing media technologies. [*indigenous activism, media, imagination, ideology, racism, American Indians*]

Over the past two decades, anthropologists have examined the use of new media technologies by indigenous peoples seeking to challenge their place in the "savage slot" of national and transnational imaginaries (Ginsburg 1991, 2002a; Prins 2002; Trouillot 1991; Turner 1992, 2002). Critical anthropological engagement with such indigenous media activism has recognized the creativity inherent in it and also the contradictions entailed in the use of new media as vehicles for indigenous agendas. Recent work on mediation and cultural circulation (Lee and LiPuma 2002; Mazzarella 2004; Urban 2001) argues that particular processes of mediation can both facilitate and constrain the messages carried by a given medium. Such research suggests that studies must address the impact and effectiveness of indigenous projects that use existing mass media as activist vehicles and ask where, precisely, a medium's power with respect to the activist project is located.

In this article, I examine the activist use of a novel medium of communication by members of the Ho-Chunk Nation in Wisconsin in their efforts to challenge the colonial–racial ideologies and institutions shaping their everyday lives in the first half of the 20th century. My particular focus is the career and reception of the first Ho-Chunk activist to use the then-dominant mode of mediation—the newspaper—as a vehicle for such a project. From 1930 to 1949, Charles Round Low Cloud wrote a weekly column for the Black River Falls *Banner-Journal* newspaper titled "Indian News," which focused on the lives of local families from the Ho-Chunk Nation. At first, much of the news Low Cloud reported was indistinguishable from that appearing in the other local news columns filling the back pages of the paper. Each week he listed the visits, illnesses, births, deaths, and other everyday events that had taken place within his community. He also reported distinctly Indian events, from preparations for the annual homecoming powwow to community meetings held to discuss land claims and political reorganization. As the years went by, his "Indian News" became increasingly distinct from the *Banner-Journal*'s other local news columns. This was due

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in part to newspaper editor Harriet Noble's decision to stop copyediting Low Cloud's text, allowing it to appear in "broken English" (see Flesch 1946 and below), but also to Low Cloud's own expanding agenda as a columnist. Within a few years of the column's inception, he began to report on local acts of discrimination against the Ho-Chunk people and to comment on the systematic racism of white institutions. In a 1942 column, he editorialized that "if an Indian kill a woodchuck and game warden see him the Indian is put in jail for about 90 days. When white man kill a chicken or pig or cow nobody say anything. Indian has no money to fight any law, white man makes his own law" (November 4). Such news items and commentary politicized the "Indian News" and made it a form of indigenous activism unprecedented in Ho-Chunk people's history.

During his lifetime, Low Cloud received widespread but fleeting attention for his work in publications ranging from the *Milwaukee Journal* to the *New York Times*. Yet, even as such publications took notice of his work, they obscured his activist agenda. Never investigating Low Cloud's charges of discrimination, their profiles of his work, instead, celebrated the nonstandard English that gave his column a voice amusing to non–Ho-Chunk readers. *Time* magazine's 1944 profile repeated the local notion that Low Cloud "thinks in Indian and writes in English" to explain the column's apparent "disregard for grammar and punctuation," quoting particularly convoluted examples of his prose as evidence. Such accounts minimized the force of his criticisms by linking Low Cloud and his writing to derogatory stereotypes. *Time* (1944), for example, insinuated that he dipped "his blunt pencil in vitriol to discuss the Indian and the white man" while "under the spell of a hangover." Making his voice rather than the facts reported in the column the basis of his recognition, the published accounts of his work helped ensure that although Low Cloud was remembered, the content of his news, and its political message, was forgotten.

Low Cloud's "Indian News" thus provides an early example of ongoing efforts by indigenous peoples to use mass media in resisting cultural domination and in the struggle for self-determination (Ginsburg 2002a:211). More importantly, it also exemplifies what Faye Ginsburg has characterized as the "double set of possibilities" inherent in activist uses of mass media, the possibility that such media will enable indigenous people to respond "to and through the categories that have been created to contain" them but also the possibility that they will impose and reproduce "the values and language of the dominant culture" (2002b:51). If the first possibility recognizes the agency of the indigenous activist in making creative use of new modes of mediation, the second possibility points to the agency that lurks in modes of mediation themselves, their capacity to work as "active metaphors," to impose form and meaning on the content they carry (Mazzarella 2004). A growing body of literature examines the first sort of agency, particularly in the indigenous communities of the Amazon (see Conklin 1997; Conklin and Graham 1995; Graham 2002; Oakdale 2004; Turner 2002), showing the essentially "hybrid" and innovative nature of the strategies used by activists in efforts to communicate with their audiences. The second sort of agency has also been the subject of a dynamic literature in anthropology, particularly a critical literature on print cultures and their links to the production and reproduction of national imaginaries (see Lee 2001; Lee and LiPuma 2002; Silverstein 2000; Warner 1991). Both literatures draw on analyses of the language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998) that help to shape the interpretation of messages and their makers in various public spheres (see, especially, Graham 2002, n.d.; Hill 1998, 2008). The case of Low Cloud's "Indian News" suggests that the agency of the media in undermining indigenous activism is founded on the ideologies that circulate through the realm of mediation but that these ideologies must be made relevant to indigenous media through the agency of various people involved in the process of mediation.

In this article, I examine the making and muting of Low Cloud's "Indian News" in terms of the agency of indigenous activists and also of the agency of the apparently apolitical individuals involved in the process of mediation. Influenced by Cornelius Castoriadis's (1987, 1997) argument that the imagination must be understood as the capacity to create or choose innovative frameworks for action, I emphasize the role of the imagination in the agency of both sets of individuals, from the creative imagination of individuals like Low Cloud in producing new modes of activism to the reproductive imagination that Noble and other media workers used in making Low Cloud's work conform to the prevailing ideologies about indigenous authenticity and voice. By emphasizing the role of the imagination in both cases, I suggest that both activism and reaction must be founded in the "social doings . . . of men and women in society" (Castoriadis 1987:373; see also Castoriadis 1997:251). Such social doings are mediated in at least two interrelated senses: first, by the cultural ideologies and interpretive frameworks that individuals encounter throughout lives lived in a particular place and time, and, second, by their active engagement with a medium in its material and cultural specificity (Mazzarella 2004). I argue that Low Cloud's "Indian News" reveals how the mediated imagination of individuals can both give birth to novel political projects and reproduce existing ideological frameworks. The recognition of the mediated imagination therefore provides a vital complement to the effort to understand how language and cultural ideologies rationalize and discipline interpretations of social reality (Hill 2008; Irvine and Gal 2000; Keane 2003; Woolard 1998:12). It also provides a way to understand the limits of indigenous activism that uses existing media

channels and the significance of efforts to create new institutional sites of mediation.

Becoming the "Indian Report"

Charles Round Low Cloud lived a life that reflects a particular moment in the history of his people. When Low Cloud was born in 1872, the Ho-Chunk were just about to prevail in their four-decades-long struggle against federal efforts to remove them from their Wisconsin homeland. Special revisions to the Homestead Act in 1875 and 1881 allowed them to take up homesteads on unclaimed land in Wisconsin and other nearby areas. This led to the establishment of a number of Ho-Chunk settlements in Wisconsin's relatively underpopulated central region. In such communities, Ho-Chunk families survived by combining subsistence hunting and gardening with wage work in agriculture, tourism, and construction (Lurie 1952, 1978b; Onsager 1985). The Ho-Chunk settlement outside of Black River Falls was the largest in the state, home to about five hundred Ho-Chunk people, and centered on the Evangelical and Reformed Church mission, which led to the settlement's popular designation as the "Mission" (Lurie 1952:279).

Born just outside of Black River Falls, Low Cloud grew up on his family's homestead, where he was able to participate both in traditional Ho-Chunk culture and in the activities unique to the new era. Known in his community for his knowledge of genealogy and traditional medicine (Clark and Wyman 1973; Zeno 1973), Low Cloud also had an unusually extensive experience of the world beyond Black River Falls. He traveled to Chicago in 1893 as one of a group of performers for an Indian village attraction at the World Columbian Exposition, and he was one of the first three individuals from his community to attend Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Pennsylvania (1893–99). When he returned to Black River Falls in 1899, his education allowed him to find additional work as an interpreter for the local court and as an assistant to the superintendent of the local Bureau of Indian Affairs office (see Clark and Wyman 1973; *Milwaukee Journal* 1944; Smith 1944).

In his literacy, Charles Low Cloud also reflected his era in Ho-Chunk history. Members of the Ho-Chunk community living on a Nebraska reservation (organized as the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) acquired the ability to write their language in the 1880s by adapting a syllabic writing system used by the Meskwaki Nation of Iowa. The reservation agent reported to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in an 1885 letter that "the tribe have suddenly taken to writing their own language, and people who have never learned English have acquired this art" (Fletcher 1890:299; see Walker 1996 on American Indian writing systems). The Ho-Chunk people sought to acquire literacy in English during the same period, as soon as they recognized the practical value of the skill for their dealings with the United States and its citizens.

Figure 1. Charles Round Low Cloud in *Banner-Journal* publisher Merlin Hull's office, ca. 1941. Photograph courtesy of Black River Falls Public Library–Jackson County History Room.

In 1875, one of the first acts of the residents of the Ho-Chunk settlement near Black River Falls was to construct a school building and advertise for a teacher, leading eventually to the opening of the Mission school and church that figured prominently in Low Cloud's column (Lurie 1952:261; see Figure 1).

When he began writing his "Indian News" column for the Black River Falls *Banner-Journal* (2,790 average weekly circulation), Low Cloud was in his late fifties and making a living by engaging in the same sort of seasonal labor that supported most of the Ho-Chunk families in the state. He made a weekly six-mile journey from his home at the Mission settlement to the newspaper's offices to compose his column. Low Cloud's first column, published on December 31, 1930, closely resembled the reports from Alma, Pleasant View, and Irving townships that surrounded it on the page, offering terse accounts of mundane local events:

INDIAN MISSION[1]

Jas. Yellowbank exchanged his Nash car for a Ford truck and will commence hauling bolts.

Will Shegona, who is employed at Port Edwards paper mill, came to visit Henry Stack, Sunday. He was with his family.

A Christmas social will be had at the Indian Mission church. Many Indians, old and young, will join to make it a joyous affair.

Alvin Stacy, senior at Mission college, Plymouth, Wis., returned to spend holidays with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Stacy.

Mr. and Mrs. George Lind of Wisconsin Rapids were here to look after their timber interests. They were guests of Mr. and Mrs. D. W. Decorah.

> Tom Thunder is here to stage a celebration in fashion of his liking, with tom-tom and all its accompaniments, Christmas Eve. He expects a large attendance.

Like the other country correspondents whose columns appeared in the *Banner-Journal,* Low Cloud reported on the comings and goings of community members and significant visitors from elsewhere as well as the "too bad news" of local deaths, illnesses, and accidents. He also allowed others to post information to the column, quoted letters he had received from readers, and reprinted the text of announcements for local events. From 1941 to 1945, the column was filled with news of Ho-Chunks serving in the war or working in war industries, based on their letters and postcards to their families or on their visits home during leave. Soldiers also wrote directly to Low Cloud to request that he relay their news to his readers.

In addition to these items about the lives of the individuals and families who made up the Ho-Chunk community, the "Indian News" carried special news of the collective activities the Ho-Chunk undertook as a people, including local ceremonial activities (occasionally to the displeasure of Ho-Chunks who felt such information should remain private), preparations for the annual powwow, and participation in regional tourist performances. The columns also contained important news on the political activities of the period, reporting meetings held to discuss pressing issues in policy, including the Indian Reorganization Act (1934; see Satz 1994), the actions of the Indian Claims Commission, and a variety of investigations initiated by members of the community into land loss due to county seizures of Ho-Chunk homesteads.

Although the basic categories of news remained constant throughout the column's history, Low Cloud made changes in the "Indian News" during its first four years of publication that gradually transformed it into something very different from the other local news reports appearing in the *Banner-Journal*: He broadened its initial goal of simply ensuring that "Indian [were] represented in the news" (Merlin Hull, as interviewed by Leo Srole [1938]) to one of more active engagement with local life. The new agenda was signaled by the appearance of editorial comments. In a 1933 report on the death of a local resident, for example, Low Cloud not only noted that "quite a few Indians very sorry for John Levis passed away a few days ago" but also went on to explain that "he never cheat any Indian or make fun of them, always had a good square deal with them" (March 8). Most of Low Cloud's editorial comments addressed local Indian–white relations. In a column from June 22, 1932, he reported that "white boys" had shot two Ho-Chunk men while the latter were picking berries, adding that "we don't want to put bad news on this nice paper, we wish this journal carries only good news, but we cannot help it, we have to put what is happened" (see also Clark and Wyman 1973:24). This commentary accompanies the earliest appearance of such confrontational charges in his column. Its apologetic tone suggests that Low Cloud recognized how much it contrasted with what his readers expected to find in the newspaper.

Low Cloud's comments on his account of the shooting invoke his role as newspaper reporter charged with providing a truthful record of recent events and justify his violation of the self-censorship and "strategies of euphemization" that were professional norms for journalists and newspaper publishers (e.g., Schiller 1981; see Bourdieu 1991). He would refer to key journalistic values in comments throughout the history of his column and referred to himself as the "Indian Report." He emphasized the factual nature of his stories, writing in 1933 that his column contained "lots of good story, real good story, not to make a story book, 'true story'" (June 21). As this quote suggests, he insisted that his work as a reporter was different from storytelling, and he occasionally justified the absence of his column or of a report on an important recent event by citing a lack of factual information, noting in one case that he "would like to tell everything true, not make up anything story to write on this paper" (April 18, 1934).

In addition to asserting the veracity of his reports as news, Low Cloud increasingly used his columns for editorial purposes, seeking to challenge the idea that Indian people were poor and marginal members of the local community because they clung to an outmoded way of life (e.g., *Badger State Banner* 1874). He, instead, described the history of theft that had made them poor and the continuing discrimination that kept them that way. He documented discrimination at the hands of game wardens and law enforcement officers, local merchants, relief agencies, and governments from the local to the federal level. A column he wrote just after Independence Day, 1933, signaled his disenchantment with U.S. society and its institutions and introduced an ongoing theme of the column:

> Last Monday [July 3] C.R. Low Cloud went into Robert Werner's store and Robert want to know what did he want, and same time he offer him some firecrackers, and have a good celebration. Low Cloud says "I am not going to celebrations," Robert said "Why not?" I said "I am Indian. Because white people stole Indian land that reason they have celebrations." [July 5]

He expressed similar sentiments about Thanksgiving and toward U.S. heroes such as Christopher Columbus. His Independence Day columns epitomized his vision of local life as fundamentally divided by the opposed history and interests of Indians and whites.[2]

One of the best examples of the way Low Cloud used the "Indian News" as a vehicle for activism is found among columns written in the fall of 1941. That September,

community member Leo Red Bird was shot in the back by a local white tavern owner, who accused him of snooping around his house at night. Red Bird was taken to the Tomah Indian Hospital, where he soon died of his wounds. The *Banner-Journal*'s initial account of the murder, published three days later, did not mention his death, offering only the tavern owner's account of the incident. It ended with the hope that "the treatment [Red Bird] received Sunday night will be more effective in curing him than . . . the county jail or the asylum" would have been (*Banner-Journal* 1941). Low Cloud responded in the next issue, appending Red Bird's name to a list of the "many Indians [who] were killed by white people" over the previous 40 years. The nine deaths he listed provided evidence of the systematic nature of anti-Indian violence from Low Cloud's perspective. In addition to straightforward cases of homicide, the list included deaths caused by accidents or bureaucratic neglect, thus emphasizing the institutional nature of the discrimination and injustice Indians faced. Low Cloud wrote that he was publishing the list, "[to] show the Winnebago Indians could not get any help from this city of Black River Falls, Tomah, and Wisconsin Rapids, and even Tomah Indian Agency office. No matter who is Superintendent that office" (September 17, 1941). When announcing the inquest into Red Bird's death in his next column, Low Cloud expressed skepticism about the result of the hearing, charging that the outcome had already been decided and "we know that we can not do anything. May be Leo Red Bird was shot to death, but he have to pay" (September 24, 1941).

Although titled "Indian News," Low Cloud's column also functioned as a "portrait of the Whiteman" (Basso 1978), echoing traditional indigenous teachings about the nature of white people. The Ho-Chunk term for a white person is *maixede,* "long-knife," a term of pan-Indian provenance that dates to the struggles of the late 17th to early 19th centuries (Chamberlain 1912; Goddard 2005). In the contemporary oral traditions of the community, to call someone a "white man" was equivalent to calling him a liar and a thief (James Smoke, interview with Leo Srole [1938]). A comment made by Low Cloud in a 1937 column summarizes such views: "The White people defraud of Indians at the first place, or when they meet the Indian. . . . They are getting worse every year, and they are always look good, wear nice clothes, but 'bad inside'" (September 29). Low Cloud reinforced the lessons of his reports about whites through the use of aphoristic statements, such as "the old time Indian scalped his enemies [but] the white man skins his friends and calls it business" (e.g., August 27, 1941). Another maxim he frequently repeated charged that for "white people their god is money" (e.g., August 5, 1936). These pithy statements provide evidence of the way Low Cloud synthesized Ho-Chunk traditions with the more general discourses of U.S. (and American Indian) society: The idea that white people scalped their friends in the guise of doing business was expressed in a pan-Indian proverb popular in Oklahoma by the turn of the 20th century (Anonymous 1906), and the notion that white Americans worshipped money was recorded in travel reports from European visitors to North America as early as the 18th century (Withington 1945).

In creating his column and his activist message, Low Cloud acted with the same creativity exhibited by more recent indigenous activists in Latin America and elsewhere (Graham 2002:211). His "Indian News" was an "innovative hybrid form" (Graham 2002) for conveying his activist message, although unlike recent "culture-conscious" activists (Oakdale 2004), Low Cloud made little effort to represent his Ho-Chunk identity in the column or in his person by deliberately deploying indigenous representational forms (Conklin 1997; Graham 2002:212). He drew on Ho-Chunk oral traditions not to assert an identity or to establish his authenticity but to enlighten his readers about the truth of his people's world. Paradoxically, the recognition he would eventually earn for his work in writing the "Indian News" would be, in large part, a consequence of efforts by others to give his writings a stylistic authenticity he sought to avoid.

Giving "Indian News" its voice: Harriet Noble's editorial agency

Although the recognition that Low Cloud received for "Indian News" focused primarily on the distinctive style of the published column, this voice was not one of the resources he intended to use as part of his activist agenda. In one of the first general accounts of the column and its local popularity, the *Milwaukee Journal* reported that Low Cloud "has a bit of a complex about his composition. Some of the Winnebagoes have intimated it is a reflection on their tribe. So Charlie writes, then asks Mrs. Noble if it is satisfactory. She reassures him" (1944). In another account of the column, Noble admitted that "ever and anon [Low Cloud] asks me if a word is spelled right, and if his English is proper" (Smith 1944:15). Decades later, Emma Olson, a teacher at the Mission school, recalled that Low Cloud had asked her to review and rewrite his early columns (Clark and Wyman 1973:9). It was, as Noble confessed in a number of interviews, her own decision (during 1932–33) to begin to publish the column without editing it. She decided to do so "to keep the charm of it intact," she told the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1944, but also, in more economistic terms, because she felt she could not "afford to have his best stuff ruined right in front of me" (1944; see Figure 2).

Viewed retrospectively, Noble seems to have violated her responsibilities both to Low Cloud and to the standards of her profession. Contemporary handbooks for publishers and editors all emphasized that "copy-reading the correspondence . . . needs to be as carefully done as copy-reading of other news" (Allen 1928:118; Bleyer 1923:291)

Figure 2. *Banner-Journal* editor Harriet Noble (left) and Charles Round Low Cloud (right) in the *Banner-Journal* offices in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, ca. 1941. Photograph courtesy of Black River Falls Public Library–Jackson County History Room.

and stressed that a newspaper's reputation depended on maintaining a consistent journalistic voice. In the words of Grant Milnor Hyde's *Journalistic Writing,* "The journalist uses the English language merely to transmit facts" (1935:24) and seeks to produce copy that has "no characteristic form, style or technique" (1935:26). According to Hyde's *Newspaper Handbook,* "The chief characteristic of good newspaper writing" was clearness, "a matter of clear thought and correct grammar" (1941:51).

As historians have shown, these ideas about objectivity and voice developed with the rise of the popular press in the early 19th century. Newspaper publishers seeking to make their product attractive to a mass market sought increasingly "objective" presentations of the news of the world, competing with each other on the basis of the value and accuracy of the information they contained (see, e.g., Schudson 1978). An "objective" voice became a badge of professionalism for reporters (and editors) seeking to survive the pitched class struggles of the early 20th century and to avoid the necessity of taking sides in the debates of the day (Nord 2001; Schiller 1981). The search for an objective voice mobilized more general cultural prejudices linking intelligence to the ability to speak standard English. In such ideologies, the use of "correct" grammar, the appropriate lexical register, and the successful avoidance of accents and other markers of gender, race, or ethnic identification all became elements of authoritative speech. As scholars have shown, such practices helped to make the U.S. public sphere a de facto "white public sphere," subordinating voices marked as nonwhite (as well as those marked as nonmale and nonpropertied) because their deviation from standard grammar branded them as not only socially different but also cognitively inferior (Hill 1998, 2008; Lippi-Green 1997; Warner 1990).

One can begin to unpack the significance of Noble's treatment of Low Cloud through a comparison with an analogous case from Brazil analyzed by Laura Graham. Looking at important indigenous politician Mario Juruna (Conklin and Graham 1995), Graham argues that Brazilian newspapers stopped copyediting the transcripts of Juruna's speeches in Portuguese, allowing them to be published with grammatical errors as part of an effort to discredit him and neutralize the challenges his popularity and message posed to the dominant business and political elite (Graham n.d.). Publication without copyediting resulted in speeches that evoked already existing racist attitudes toward indigenous peoples rooted in ideologies that associated ungrammatical speech with intellectual inferiority.

Whereas the significance of the decision to cease copyediting seems similar in the case of Low Cloud, the blatant political motivations in the Juruna case seem less applicable to the *Banner-Journal*'s treatment of his "Indian News." Noble could have silenced Low Cloud's message either by taking out the information and commentary that did not conform to other local news columns or by simply ceasing to publish his column altogether. Either tactic was possible because Low Cloud's status as a public figure depended entirely on the *Banner-Journal*'s publication of his writing. Noble acknowledged this dependence in a 1945 news item in which she described Low Cloud as "indebted" to the paper for his fame (*Banner-Journal* 1945). She also noted the obvious economic incentive for her to continue to publish the column, describing the *Banner-Journal,* in turn, as indebted to Low Cloud for providing news "which is of interest to its readers."

In the absence of evidence of a conscious intention to denigrate Low Cloud's news, Noble's practice of treating the "Indian News" differently from other parts of the *Banner-Journal* can be seen as the result of an unthinking decision grounded in her perception of Low Cloud as a writer for whom nonstandard English was acceptable and appropriate. Studies have demonstrated that even linguistically trained scholars can unwittingly produce denigrating representations of the speech of individuals from stigmatized populations because of unconscious prejudices. As Dennis R. Preston has argued, scholars routinely differentiate the speech of subordinated social groups when representing it in print by using "respellings" and other transcriptional approaches that are valueless for subsequent linguistic analysis but effectively transmit to readers "a negative or condescending attitude" toward the speaker (1982:322, 1985:329).

Comments Noble made suggest that she had a condescending attitude toward Low Cloud, particularly her own admission that she never paid Low Cloud a regular salary for his column, as she did other columnists, even after it became the "most entertaining and enjoyable feature"

in the *Banner-Journal* (Clark and Wyman 1973:17–19). Instead, she required that he ask for "handouts" for taxi fares and other expenses. She justified this arrangement by noting that Low Cloud "did not mix well with prosperity" (Clark and Wyman 1973:17–19). Although presented as an expression of her concern for Low Cloud's well being, both her treatment of him and her rationalization for it manifest a paternalistic form of the racism Low Cloud repeatedly condemned in his column.

Whatever her intentions, Noble's decision to withhold copyediting from the "Indian News" produced a voice for the column that marked it as different from the rest of the newspaper and from the professional standards of journalistic prose. As in other forms of public discourse, objectivity in this case was associated with a conventional style of "realist reportage" that required the negation of signs of particularistic personal or collective identities (especially those that signaled gendered or racialized selves), to produce an "objective authorial voice" (Silverstein 2000:126; Warner 1990; Williams 1983). Noble was thus an agent in the production of the voice of the "Indian News" in a way that, ultimately, had a role in shaping the column's reception. By ensuring that the "Indian News" lacked the voice associated with the other news reported in the *Banner-Journal* and similar newspapers, Noble, whether intentionally or not, implicitly warned readers against accepting Low Cloud's words as news, that is, as the sort of objective perspective on reality conventionally associated with a news column.

Noble's decision not to copyedit the "Indian News" had a paradoxical effect on Low Cloud's project. Had his column remained a conventionally copyedited chronicle of local events in the Black River Falls area, it would have been unlikely to draw the attention of readers beyond the region. Without the fame he enjoyed as the "voice of the Winnebago," his accounts of local life and documentation and condemnation of local racism would have had little chance of finding commemoration in the decades following his death. Yet it was the voice that Noble's decision helped to produce that allowed his news and editorial observations to be ignored.

Celebrating the voice and muting the news: Commentary as vehicle for ideology

Although Noble's decision to withhold copyediting from the "Indian News" had an impact on Low Cloud's local reputation and reception throughout the 1930s, its more lasting impact came in the 1940s, as the first major accounts of Low Cloud's work as a columnist began to appear in publications outside of Black River Falls. In the fall of 1944, the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Quill* (Smith 1944) both published substantial profiles of Low Cloud, filled with excerpts from his column. Their accounts were followed by a profile in *Time* magazine (1944) and a second account in the *Milwaukee Journal* (Lansing 1945) that garnered Low Cloud enough recognition to earn him national attention, leading to the reprinting of some of his writings in *Collier's* magazine and, later, an obituary in the *New York Times* (1949; see Clark and Wyman 1973:16). In addition to publicizing Low Cloud's work, the commentaries codified a framework for understanding the "Indian News" that endures to the present day. A close examination of them reveals how those involved in publishing and publicizing Low Cloud's writings exercised agency to mute his activist message.

The articles in the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Quill* were filled with amusing extracts from Low Cloud's column, interspersed with biographical anecdotes. They mentioned Low Cloud's education at Carlisle as well as his varied adult work history. Most importantly, the authors of the articles chose to focus their attention on the distinctive voice of the "Indian News" rather than on the themes of Low Cloud's reports. Their accounts worked to authenticate the column's voice in three interrelated ways. First, they argued that although the casual reader might assume that Low Cloud's voice was either the product of his "nonchalance toward fine grammar and punctuation" or an effort to imitate "Indian English" for humorous purposes, it was more correctly understood as evidence that Low Cloud thought "in Indian" and wrote "in original English" (Smith 1994:5). Second, they described Low Cloud in the act of writing, offering the descriptions as ostensive evidence of the authenticity of the published text. The first lines of the *Milwaukee Journal*'s 1944 article, for example, portrayed Low Cloud's writing process: "The pencil pinched by the blunt, thick, fingers moved deliberately. The thoughts took shape on the page." Each detail provided evidence of Low Cloud's presence in the published column. Third, each profile quoted Noble, and sometimes Merlin Hull and other *Banner-Journal* staff, testifying to the column's authenticity.

The samples of Low Cloud's writings presented in the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Quill* profiles also shaped subsequent understanding of the contents of the "Indian News." Each article noted the wide range of topics covered in the column, with its reports "of simple things—the weather, new babies, deaths, Indian ceremonials, Indian boys in the service" (*Milwaukee Journal* 1944). The sample items quoted failed to give a sense of the activist themes that had developed over the course of the previous decade. They quoted Low Cloud to emphasize the amusement that readers should derive from the incongruity of his use of broken English to describe international diplomacy or national party politics, avoiding dissemination of his pointed criticisms of U.S. society. They sometimes hinted at Low Cloud's account of white people and white racism but did so in ways that suggested that his comments were colored by emotion and clouded by other factors; as the *Milwaukee Journal* put it, Low Cloud occasionally offered a "bit of commentary"

on "the unfair treatment of the Indians by white people," becoming "quite bitter . . . especially when nursing a hangover" (1944). The direct link between acknowledgment of Low Cloud's criticism of white racism and the insinuations of alcoholism was repeated in the profile of 1945 and also in the introduction to William Leslie Clark and William D. Wyman's 1973 collection of extracts from Low Cloud's columns.

Perhaps the clearest diagnostic evidence of the impact of the profiles on subsequent reception of Low Cloud's "Indian News" is the dissemination of a single column, frequently cited as a "favorite" by his contemporaries (including Noble, in later life). First quoted in the *Milwaukee Journal*'s 1944 article merely as an example of Low Cloud's writing, the excerpt subsequently appeared in profiles and accounts of Low Cloud as a legendary one-sentence column, purported to have read, "Not much news this week, Indian report in jail" (Clark and Wyman 1973; Davis 1956; Lansing 1945; *Milwaukee Journal* 1944; Smith 1944).[3] In the context supplied by the commentaries, the implication is clearly that Low Cloud had been arrested for drunkenness (see, e.g., Clark and Wyman 1973). What Low Cloud actually wrote, however, had a very different message. As originally published, the column began: "Not much news this week in Indian news, Reporter is in Jackson County jail one week now, and he had trouble with his neighbor, a farmer, and he had trouble with not fixing farm's fence, destroy all crops what he had in garden stuff and trying to fix this fence but farmer would not let them. Doing all he [wasn't] looking for trouble with his neighbor" (September 26, 1934). The actual news Low Cloud reported here offered a very personal example of the conflicts and institutionalized oppression characteristic of Ho-Chunk relations with whites in the period. Other Ho-Chunk people reported similar conflicts over gardens and farm animals in contemporary interviews. Although not representative of Low Cloud's concerns as a columnist and media activist, this account accurately reflected the ideological portrait drawn by profiles and commentaries on his column.

The profiles that celebrated Low Cloud's voice thus functioned as an interpretive framework for understanding his reports, making the "semiotic ideologies" (Keane 2003) surrounding Indian and other minority voices in U.S. society directly relevant to the interpretation of the "Indian News." By defending the authenticity of the column's voice while remarking on the author's "bitterness" and "resentment" and openly charging that his column was written "under the spell of a hangover" (*Time* 1944), the commentaries worked to orient readers toward a particular interpretation of its voice, one in which the "Indian News" was to be read as a manifestation of preexisting stereotypes of American Indian speech. The "Indian News" became, in this interpretation, a purportedly authentic token of the mocking representation of American Indian English Barbara Meek has called "Hollywood Injun English" (HIE). As Meek explains, HIE uses general linguistic ideologies about the speech patterns of children and foreigners to depict Indian speakers as "imbued with a weak mind and a childlike persona" (2006:120) and to buttress the racist image of them as unsocialized and uncivilized. Celebrations of the authenticity of Low Cloud's broken English thus provided a cover for what Jane Hill (1998, 2008) has called the "covert conceptual subordination" performed by mocking speech styles, transforming prose that would otherwise seem merely perplexing or annoying because of its convoluted syntax and grammatical errors into an amusing manifestation of a racist stereotype. As a vehicle for this semiotic ideology, commentaries on the "Indian News" constitute another example of how the agency of individuals involved in the column's publication and dissemination could undermine Low Cloud's activist agenda.

Conclusion

Low Cloud's "Indian News" provides important insights into the contradictory possibilities of indigenous media activism, showing that a mass medium may promise to provide activists a means of making their messages heard but that it also can be used by those seeking to suppress activist messages. The following general lessons can be drawn from the preceding discussion of Low Cloud's career and its reception.

The "Indian News" demonstrates the creative nature of indigenous media activism and provides a sense of the extent to which novel modes of mediation can be used to serve indigenous ends. Low Cloud's choice of medium, the newspaper column, reflected the well-established history of literacy in the Ho-Chunk community. He combined that legacy with his long-term immersion in an intercultural world to exploit the potentials of that medium in ways that were creative and unprecedented in the local public sphere. Over its two-decade history, Low Cloud's "Indian News" produced a vision of Ho-Chunk life and Indian–white relations that he shared with readers in Wisconsin and beyond. Because his news appeared in print, it has endured as a unique archive of Ho-Chunk life and perspectives on U.S. society in the first part of the 20th century. Moreover, Low Cloud's example, and his popularity, inspired other Ho-Chunks to begin writing newspaper columns during the same period, creating variations of his "Indian News" shaped by their own unique writing styles and sets of concerns but also sharing with Low Cloud key themes, especially on the subject of white people and the inequities of daily life. Low Cloud thus engaged in activism that was successful inasmuch as it drew on the potentials of the newspaper to provide a new framework for communication and to facilitate creative efforts to defend Ho-Chunk identity and challenge white hegemony. The idea of the news report

became an "active metaphor" that allowed for the "translation of [Ho-Chunk] experience into new forms" (Mazzarella 2004:357). Inasmuch as the imagination was the root of this creativity, providing a "fuel for [creative] action" (Appadurai 1996:7; see also Castoriadis 1987, 1997), his media activism thus expressed an agency rooted in the imagination.

The history of the "Indian News" also reveals another mode of the mediated imagination by demonstrating how activist media projects can be undone through the process I have called "muting." The silence of indigenous people in historical records and in the contemporary public sphere may have a number of causes, including their refusal to speak and various forms of censorship (Basso 1970; Trouillot 1995), but "muting" implies both the active imposition of silence by others and a technological process rooted in the media form itself. Muting in this sense constitutes one of the more subtle challenges facing indigenous media activists. Just as the creativity of activist projects does, the muting of activism entails actions by specific social actors, such as Noble in the case of the "Indian News." Her impact on the reception of the "Indian News" had its roots in choices she made, consciously or not, between various courses of action. She could have treated Low Cloud in the same way she did other *Banner-Journal* correspondents, but, instead, she found reasons to treat his copy differently from other news reports. Noble worked within existing institutions and ideologies to make the published version of the "Indian News" conform to existing ideologies concerning American Indian speakers, perpetuating the same racist framework that Low Cloud wrote against. Her role might be seen as an example of the process of linguistic differentiation, identified by Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (Gal 2005; Irvine and Gal 2000), at its most concretely agentive. Linguistic differentiation binds together a language image with a social image, projecting one sort of categorical opposition (such as the contrast between "Indians" and "whites") onto other levels or aspects of social existence (the standardizability of prose, the quality of thought and perception, the objectivity of news) while "forgetting, denying, ignoring, or forcibly eliminating those distinctions or social facts that fail to fit the picture of the world presented by an ideology" (Gal 2005:27). Recognizing Noble's role as an agent in the process of differentiation helps emphasize the concrete human beings and events of mediation behind the more general process of differentiation.

The history of Low Cloud's media activism demonstrates the human agency and imagination that create the semiotic ideologies of language and identity explored in recent work in linguistic anthropology (Hill 2008; Keane 2003; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998). The commentary that developed around Low Cloud's column in 1944 publicized an approach that quickly became institutionalized. The interpretive framework it supplied suggested to readers that the nonstandard form of the column, produced through the agency of Noble and company, could be linked directly and solely to Low Cloud's identity as an Indian. It thus made the published form of the column an indirect link between Low Cloud's writings and derogatory stereotypes of American Indians in U.S. culture. Alternative approaches, including critical analysis of the role of the *Banner-Journal* in producing its ungrammatical voice or any real attention to the facts Low Cloud reported, were ignored. The lesson is that events in which people employ their creative imaginations are moments of ideology in the making or remaking. To invoke the work of Castoriadis (1987), ideologies are instituted, or institutionalized, products of the imagination. In the case of the "Indian News," a particular way of imagining Low Cloud and his news was so successfully institutionalized that the agency involved in its origins became invisible, as did his message, for most readers (although not all; see Zeno 1973 for Ho-Chunk recollections of Low Cloud's work). Low Cloud's career offers a unique opportunity to see the process in action.

The case of Low Cloud's "Indian News" thus illustrates both the potentials and the limitations of indigenous media activism. Historical research in Native North America has revealed the continuous efforts of native peoples to take an active role in their own representation and to define solutions to the problems they face (Deloria 2004; Lewis 2005; Morgan 2005; Wilkinson 2005). The frustration Native American activists faced in using the existing institutions of U.S. society to improve their conditions provided the motivation to switch from seeking inclusion in that larger social context to efforts to create alternative institutions through which they could exercise their own agency with less interference from whites, following what Philip Deloria has called "the birth of the dream that began to take shape under the name of sovereignty" (2004:237).

In a column written just a few months before his death, Low Cloud seemed to acknowledge the limitations he experienced in his work as a columnist, commenting, "There are many things we know but we did not say anything at all, because we are the Indians, it don't mount anything we do say any thing" (January 26, 1949). In the same column, however, he reported on the meeting of the newly created committee to prepare the Ho-Chunk claim against the U.S. government for the Indian Claims Commission, an action in which he was involved during the final year of his life. In its obituary coverage a few months later, the *Banner-Journal* published a photograph of Low Cloud taken at the election of the claims committee, noting, "It is the only picture we have ever seen of Charlie in which he is smiling" (*Banner-Journal* 1949). The organization of the claims committee was the start of a process that would lead, just over a decade later, to the reorganization of the Ho-Chunk Nation and, eventually, to a new political and economic foundation for relations between Ho-Chunk people and whites in Jackson County and elsewhere in Wisconsin (Gudinas 1971; Lurie 1978a, 1978b).

Thus, although Low Cloud's long career as a writer embodied one model of activism, he also participated in the birth of a new model, one that would be carried forth by a new generation of Ho-Chunk activists

Notes

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1. The title of the column was changed to "Indian News" in June 1934, to reflect Low Cloud's attention to Ho-Chunk issues throughout the state.

2. In what may be a manifestation of dry wit, Low Cloud revealed in a July 3, 1946, column that he had first learned the real significance of July 4 for Indians from "Capt. R. H. Pratt" at Carlisle. Captain Richard Henry Pratt (1840–1924), the army officer who created and ran Carlisle in its early years, is now infamous for his statement that the mission of Carlisle, the first off-reservation American Indian Boarding School, was to "kill the Indian to save the man." On Pratt and Carlisle, see Pratt 2004 and Adams 1997.

3. The issue of Low Cloud's drinking is complex: As Nancy Oestreich Lurie, who knew Low Cloud during the 1940s, noted in her 1971 article on American Indian drinking patterns, Low Cloud "was frequently in jail because he was frequently drunk" (1971:328). She suggests that Low Cloud used his drinking to validate his Indianness and to excuse the controversy his writing career caused in the Ho-Chunk community.

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